Briefing Paper: **Survey of State PreK-20 Programs and Initiatives**

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For the Washington Learns Steering Committee and Higher Education Advisory Committee

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Members of the Steering and Higher Education Advisory Committee have expressed concerns about the presence of "silos" in education at various meetings. Many others recognize the metaphor and consider it apt. The presence of seemingly disjointed components in what most believe should be a mutually inter-dependent program is the common source of the vexation. Actually, the system is intra-dependent: middle schools must depend on elementary schools to bring students to appropriate levels of preparation, high schools depend on the middle schools in a similar fashion, and colleges and universities look to the high schools to prepare their students for college. The school system relies on colleges and universities for the preparation of teachers and the acceptance of their graduates. This much is clear. The popular image, however, is of different sectors operating independently and in relative oblivion of each other: hence, silos.

The silo metaphor is fairly new, but the issue is not. An earlier image was of a pipeline that should be continuous and seamless, into which students would enter at one end, and out of which they would emerge as educated citizens at the other. Reality was equally harsh in that setting, as the 'pipeline' comprised a series of ill-fitting and sometimes perforated sections, through which students could make their way or not.

The difference between the two images may reflect differences in perspective: the pipeline image tends to be that of students and their parents, who need to know how to get through it; the silo image may represent the perspective of officials and legislators who are concerned with effectiveness, efficiency, and accountability.

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Both are defensible, if sometimes overstated, although they also can lead to different conceptions of a solution. The silo metaphor may incline one to consolidation, unifying the system by eliminating or combining the silos; the pipeline image may take one in the direction of coordination, working together to create workarounds, but leaving the basic structure intact.[1]

Examples of both are evident throughout the country, although those based on coordination vastly outnumber those directed to consolidation. In some ways this is indirect testimony to the strength and persistence of the infrastructures of the subsystems that constitute education in all states. Distinct constituencies, cultures, salary and tenure systems, collective bargaining frameworks, and peer systems, are characteristics. These are deeply entrenched and reinforced by such issues as separate titles in the Revised Code[2] and dedicated funding requirements, budgets, and models, sometimes mandated, as in Washington, by Constitutional requirements and court orders. Impressions of a zero-sum budget game prevail, sustaining competition and dampening cooperation. Federal funding and program regulations also contribute to the partition, or, as some say, the Balkanization.

Even in states such as Michigan, where efforts to assure a guaranteed funding base with an inflation clause for K-16 are afoot, the competition is likely to continue as education sectors would not be blocked from competing for larger shares of the funds. Even if successful, the change would guarantee only the level of funds, not their disbursement.

Considerable attention has been directed to different aspects of the problem in all states over the years, and a number and sizeable variety of inter-sector collaborations have formed or been established. Washington has been in the forefront of many of these: its statewide public and private two- and four-year institution articulation agreements and Running Start program are two examples. Solutions such as these, based on coordination are the typical style. These may not draw a lot of attention and can be too easily dismissed, but this is how a lot gets done.

Only two states have merged, or consolidated, their education structures, or silos, into one education system, and both predate the present interest in PreK-20 systems. In the first case, Idaho, the State Department of Education dates back to the first year of statehood, 1891. While there may be some effect in

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[1] Aims McGuiness of NCHEMS first distinguished between the coordination and consolidation approaches.

[2] RCW 28A consists of the public school code; RCW 28B is devoted to higher education, and 28C is directed to “Vocational Education,” or, in more modern parlance,” Workforce Preparation.”

terms of silo control or a reduction in inter-sector competition in this consolidated system, Idaho, with its single state education agency, proceeds with about the same degree of operational fragmentation as the others. The returns are not yet in on the second state, Florida, with a recently, at least ostensibly, consolidated system. The Florida initiative is discussed further later in this briefing paper.

Because the positions are so established, attention in most states has devolved to what might be described as symptom suppression or management ("workarounds"). These often are the end products of executive or legislative pressures (or, as in the case of Running Start, statutory programs). Many proceed through inter-sector working groups or committees, some of which, such as Washington's Inter-College Articulation Committee [ICRC][3] and California's Articulation Council, acquire more than an aura of permanence. But whether or not, painstaking and time-consuming efforts always are required. Most of these are effective in terms of the issues they are intended to correct, such as concerns about credit loss when students transfer from community/technical colleges to universities, but they also usually are limited to the problem at hand, and even when they are effective, perceptions of waste and duplication never seem to go away.

In order to follow up on members of the Washington Learns Steering and Higher Education Advisory Committee interest in the issue, officials in other states were contacted by telephone to find what might be happening out there.[4] The telephone contacts continued up to the time of writing, by which date 23 states had responded with information about their respective efforts in the implementation of solutions, up to and including PreK-20 systems.[5]

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[3] ICRC was formed in 1970, as a successor to the Washington Commission on Colleges and Universities.

[4] Choice of terms is important. The original survey focus was on P-20 systems, 'pre- through graduate school.' The more conventional term, however, proved to be "K-16." Both were applied, but it was determined that a web search directed to K-16 would bring up more information than one using the term "P-20." With no intent to further complicate the matter, the abbreviation "PreK-20" is employed as the term of choice in the present paper.

[5] All of the other states were contacted. Twenty-three had responded by January 19, 2006, the cut-off date for this briefing paper. The responding states are: Alaska, Alaska, California, Florida, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia. This is subjective, but the quality of responses varied among the states, itself a reflection of the core problem. In some cases respondents in one sector, e.g., K-12, said they did not know of anything underway in this area and suggested contacting the other agency, e.g., the state higher education board, and vice-versa. In many instances the person answering the phone was not familiar with the terminology, whether, K-16, P-20 or PreK-20, and had difficulty locating the right person to contact. Efforts to locate the 'right person' usually involved a number of attempts.

Progress through Coordination

Most of the activity in the responding states clusters around a few forms in a fairly common set of programs. Essentially these are: concurrent enrollment (such as Running Start) or other college-in-high-school programs,[6] inter-sector articulation agreements, joint efforts directed to teacher/educator quality, curriculum alignment activities, and high school graduation-college admission requirements. Student data systems also are featured, some of which are aimed at the accomplishment of an education system-wide information file; most, however, pursue data sharing in a more limited field (e.g., first-year college performance of high school graduates.) Some of these coordinative efforts have statutory authority, program budgets, and permanent staff to manage them.

When programs such as these are established, other cross-sector issues often emerge. In Texas, for example, student tracking and student information systems were brought about by the concurrent enrollment program. When students move over to the receiving institution, attention to credit for previous work sharpens. This, in turn, prompts the development of articulation agreements and other inter-sector arrangements to make the main program work. Curriculum alignment, still another form of inter-sector coordination, tends to be an offshoot of articulation agreements. Articulation agreements also evolve as other changes occur. When the community college Associate of Applied Science was redefined as a transferable degree, for example, credit for 'vocational' courses became an issue in most states, including this one, bringing the skills training aspect of workforce preparation into the picture and sending the negotiators back to the conference table. And so it goes.

Most efforts at silo reduction centered on governance, such as PreK-20, actually also fit in the coordination category, treated as coordination rather than consolidation techniques when they lack the budget and staffing accoutrements that ensure permanence. As noted in an ECS Policy Brief[7] by Aims McGuiness:

> Several states established state-level structures for K-16/K-20 policy coordination between 1997 and 2002, but most of these structures were established not through formal new legislation but by Governors' Executive Orders or other means. With the exception of Florida, no state

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[6] A 1998 SHEEO survey reported that 33 states had some type of early options or dual-credit (concurrent high school-college enrollment) program. Eleven states reported that programs existed but did not provide detail. According to this survey, in 1998, 44 states reported some type of postsecondary options available for high school students. The survey was sponsored by the Oregon Joint Boards of Education, an example of the sort of governance workaround discussed later in this paper. The survey is cited in a NORED paper prepared for the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, "Postsecondary Enrollment Options for High School Students," April 2002.

[7] Aims McGuiness, "Policy Brief on Governance," July 2002.

established a new K-16/K-20 structure that merged, consolidated, or eliminated separate K-12 or postsecondary education state structures. Examples of new statutory structures that emphasize coordination rather than consolidation include:

- Georgia's A-Plus Education Reform Act of 2000 [which] created an independent Office of Educational Accountability and a new coordinating council for education to strengthen accountability across educational sectors and to oversee the new accountability office.
- Indiana's Education Roundtable, chaired by the governor, [which] was established to coordinate education policy across the education sectors.

For the most part, the state efforts in this direction are inchoate and fragile. They center on joint meetings, ad hoc working committees, and joint associations as ways to bring the separate organizations more closely together, at least for the time of the meeting. They tend not to involve fundamental restructuring. Examples include: joint legislative education committees (which of course can become permanent standing committees), inter-sector transition or relations' councils, education roundtables (frequently composed of education sector heads), and governors' education councils, P-20 initiatives, and education cabinets..

Usually lacking a statutory framework or budget, the effectiveness and endurance of such programs become functions of leadership, waxing or waning in accordance with executive or legislative priorities. If the incoming governor does not share the same passion for the issue after the incumbent leaves office, the Sisyphean pattern resumes.

Conversations have occurred in some states about whether PreK-20 should be legislated or voluntarily developed. Hawaii and Kentucky, for example, have commenced Pre-K-20 efforts without formal legislation, using grants for that purpose. In these states local education institutions may chose to participate or not, and the inter-sector agreements will be voluntary. Indeed, most of the voluntary programs have proceeded with local funds.

Some states are attempting to provide at least a modicum of a statutory structure for their PreK-20 relationships. In Missouri, for example, SB 580, which is presently under consideration by the Legislature, requires the Commission of Higher Education, the chair of the coordinating board, the Commissioner of Education, the president of the State Board of Education, and the Director of the Department of Economic Development to "meet [not less than twice each calendar year] and discuss ways in which their respective departments may collaborate in order to achieve a more efficient and effective education system that more adequately prepares students for the challenges of entering the

workforce." The bill also identifies some of the policy issues to be discussed during these meetings (a state-coordinated economic/educational policy, identifying obstacles to funding that would cross jurisdictional lines, programs the improve student success at the next education level, getting higher education faculty to spend time in public schools and private workplaces, fostering collaboration with the business sector, remediation, among others). The bill requires annual reports on progress on the specified issues each January.

Efforts at Concolidation

Programs involving coordination probably are present in all states, but examples of comprehensive education system reorganization through consolidation are sparse. At the moment it seems these may take one or all of three forms: a physically consolidated system, a unified data system, and a single system-wide budget. Idaho, mentioned earlier, has one education department and is the longest-lived example of the first sort. Nevertheless, its PreK-20 system is more a matter of form than substance. There may be some gain in terms of policy integration, but the distinctions between the segments in Idaho appear to be as substantial as those in states with more distributed education governance structures.

Florida is a more recent example in the terms that are of interest now, although the full promise of that system is yet to materialize. The genesis of Florida's change was a 1998 constitutional amendment that replaced the State Board of Education [which also had K-16 authority] with a new State Board of Education appointed by the Governor. The state's Education Governance Reorganization Act of 2000 defined the new board's responsibilities, abolished the Higher Education Board of Regents, and created separate governing boards for each university under the State Board of Education, which was responsible for overall policy governance.

Now the Governor appoints the State Superintendent, who administers the state K-20 programs. A 14-member cabinet composed of the chancellors of the K-20 divisions functions as the body that identifies issues, solutions, program development, and a comprehensive K-20 budget.

The organization is complex, but Aims McGuiness notes that that the change may not be as substantial as it seems: "The formal jurisdiction of the previous Florida State Board of Education [also] encompassed the whole Florida education system, including the state universities, community colleges and the K-12 system. Therefore, the concept of a unified K-20 system was not new in Florida. The new structure gives the concept greater focus and coherence."

He also notes that the impetus for the change was not so much a matter of creating a K-20 state structure as it was impatience with the Board of Regents

and the political controversies surrounding its approval or disapproval of new graduate and professional programs.[8]

The greatest promise of the Florida model may be the K-20 Education Data Warehouse, which is intended to integrate existing, transformed data and provide a single repository of information concerning students served in the K-20 public education system, along with data on facilities, curriculum and staff involved in instructional activities. This, of course, is an example of the second consolidation form: an integrated system-wide data system.

Other states also are moving in this direction, i.e., unified data systems. Ohio, for example, has a student information system that includes high school, community college, and four-year institution data. The system is in place and operational, and a long list of annual and special reports have been published as a result. It also appears to be evolving in the direction of even greater comprehensiveness, although it is not yet clear whether comprehensiveness will be defined as a single and complete data system for education as whole.

It can be argued that these initiatives and programs, whether they involve coordination or consolidation, ultimately must extend to the state funding systems, or budgets, that contribute to and sustain the separations. An effort to get at the underlying issues through the budget in Oregon is attracting considerable attention.

The initiative is based on an Oregon Education Roundtable white paper, *What Cost. What Results for PreK-20: The Need for a Transparent, Performance-Driven Budget to Transform Oregon Education from Preschool to Graduate School*. As part of the study, the Roundtable analyzed Oregon's 2002-2003 expenditures for K-12 and postsecondary education as though they derived from one budget. It found that the level of state investment varied dramatically by grade and degree level, with community colleges receiving the least state aid and special education in K-12 schools receiving the most. In addition, the research determined that since the passage in 1990 of Oregon's ballot measure establishing limits on property taxes, state investment in pre-K programs, middle school education, K-12 special education, and community college developmental education had increased. All other areas -- elementary and high school education, community college lower-division education and professional training, and Oregon University System lower-division, upper-division, graduate, and professional education had decreased.

The Business Council consequently recommended to the governor that Oregon adopt a reform plan for pre-K-20 governance, budgeting, and management. Under the plan, budgets would be based on per-student costs per service, outcomes would be established for every education level and service,

[8] *Ibid*.

school spending would be transparent, and student performance at every institution would be likewise. In order to implement the proposed system, the state would need to determine distinct programs, organize appropriation and expenditure data to support clear and accurate student-level resource accounting, develop and execute new resource distribution rules, and report on individual program spending and related performance.

The proposed model would span all of the education systems; outline available per-student funding from all public and private sources; isolate services into understandable bundles for purposes of analysis and decision-making; establish explicit performance expectations for each program; and report the performance of each school and program.

In the eyes of the OBC, from a strategic perspective, the Governor, the Legislature, and the Joint Boards would set performance expectations and priorities for the budget, create teams to work on efficiencies and delivery improvements in high-impact areas, and set forth a two- or three-biennium plan to accomplish the work. Through the Joint Boards, the governor would lead policy discussions and assign teams to address improvements in areas such as: high school redesign, high school and lower-division alignment, policies for tuition and need-based aid for public and private institutions, K-12 transportation, special education, and English as a second language.

The benefits would include more informed choices for decision-makers; clarity of tax dollar use; creation of opportunities for broad redesign and reinvention; and increases in program effectiveness by focusing on service quality and continuous improvement.

The OBC notes that there are several hurdles to overcome in implementing such a reform plan. State government in Oregon does not presently have the capacity to make the necessary changes, and developing this capacity will require significant legislative and public support. These transformations also are likely to take longer than the governor's term, even if re-elected, and sustaining reforms across different administrations is difficult. Finally, some entities are likely to perceive the changes as threatening and resist, creating additional setbacks along the way.

Nevertheless, according to a National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education Policy Brief to be released in March,[9] “the political leadership established the tone and expectations for change [in Oregon]. The governor set concrete goals in the areas of high school graduation, college completion, and system delivery. The Joint Boards -- [composed] of members from the State

[9] With special thanks to Center Vice-President Joni Finney for sharing the draft for use in this briefing paper for Washington Learns.

Board of Education and Board of Higher Education-then recommended the following three infrastructure components:

- "A unified education delivery system with curriculum alignment so that exit standards from one sector equal entrance standards to the next;
- "A unified data system that can track students across the continuum and by institution; and
- "A unified, transparent budget that connects all education sectors."

The Center's brief continues with the observation that most current state finance systems perpetuate the divide between K-12 and postsecondary education by creating two separate funding streams. These lack incentives that can promote and support college-readiness reforms, and in many cases they undermine such reform. The clear objective should be to provide incentives in state budgets and finance for increasing the proportion of students who complete high school and enroll in postsecondary education and training programs.

If Oregon succeeds with this model, according to OBC leadership, it should be able to reduce financial inefficiencies, target resources more strategically, fulfill the stated goals of improving student progress throughout the education pipeline, and provide a more transparent system of financing.

One last observation before leaving the OBC model, the proposal seems to presume a single education budget for the state as a whole, but there appears to be no clear reason why such a model could not a developed and applied as an analytical tool to provide the same information without completely dislocating and replacing the present budget system. This is yet to be determined, but Washington's state budget system is rather sophisticated, and it may have the capacity to develop and support such a tool.

This briefing paper ends on this note: all of the states employ separate budgets for the main components of their education system. Although many recognize the problems that emanate from this, none have been able to fully surmount them – so far none have been able to cut the Gordian knot. Coordination rather than consolidation obtains, and silos persist. The results are apparent in the myriad inter-sector programs that operate throughout the country, on the one hand, and the absence of true PreK-20 programs, on the other.